

REVIEWS • RESENSIES

Klingmann, U. 2022. *Kleines Buch zu Goethes Iphigenie auf Tauris: Zum Lesen-Zum Spielen*. Frankfurt am Main: R. G. Fischer Verlag. Pp. 61. ISBN 978-3-8301-9508-5. €9.90

Although a dedicated opera lover and despite having *Elektra* (1909) as one of my favourite operas, every time I watch Richard Strauss' very long opera *Rosenkavalier* (1911), I cannot help wondering whether, while it drags on and on for four and a half hours, whether the opera would not benefit greatly from some careful pruning, preserving the highlights and key arias. A successful example of this approach can be seen in *Der Ring an einem Abend* (1992) by the German humorist and cartoonist Lorient, who condensed the roughly 16 hours of Richard Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* tetralogy into 148 minutes with excerpts from the operas themselves linked by explanatory texts written by Lorient, often of a witty and satirical nature.

Maybe Ulrich Klingmann, a now-retired professor in the German Department at the University of Cape Town, had similar thoughts. Born in Berlin in 1941 in the middle of World War II, three months before his father was killed by the Russian army, he emigrated together with his mother and two brothers to modern-day Namibia (*Deutsch-Südwestafrika* at the time) in 1950, where he spent the next 10 years of his life in the town of Otjiwarongo, before moving to Cape Town, where he enrolled as a student with a basic knowledge of German in the same department in which he would one day become a professor. In his third semester he came across the famous play *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1779, revised in 1787) by the even more famous German poet and playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which made a lasting impression on him. In 1995 he published an article on it in the *German Quarterly*, in 2022 he published the book under review here.

The title *Kleines Buch zu Goethes Iphigenie auf Tauris: Zum Lesen-Zum Spielen* is fitting because it is a very slender volume comprising only 61 pages. It contains a preface explaining the rationale behind the project (6-7), an introductory summary of each of the five scenes, 'Aufzüge', both in English and in German (8-13), and a radically shortened version of the play itself (14-61) with a facing English translation. There is no index, nor a bibliography. It is not mentioned, but one can safely assume that Klingmann did the English translations himself. He reduced the number of lines from 2174 in Goethe's text to a mere 442, roughly a fifth, out of which he preserved 387 as in the original and shortened another 45 lines. In a few instances, he

rearranged the order of the lines but did not add anything new. He stuck exclusively to Goethe's text, only reducing it to a skeleton plot *sine qua non*. In his edition, Klingmann indicates in brackets the line numbers of Goethe's text so that the reader can easily identify the deleted parts and compare the two texts.

In the preface Klingmann states that he attempted to turn Goethe's play into an opera libretto and is convinced that, through the process of elimination, the gist of Goethe's message and its relevance for today become much clearer. This message is, according to him, the external and internal determination of the tension between the past and the present. Klingmann also emphasizes that his book rejects patriarchal claims to power, makes the contents of belief, '*Glaubensinhalte*', distorted by ideology, transparent, and demands engagement from a free and open society.

Each selection is arbitrary and subject to discussion and criticism. The author claims that he has preserved all the content-relevant passages and well-known lines, while he left out extensions in the dialogues and in other passages. It is tricky and very subjective to decide what is indispensable in a play and what not, and one can easily disagree. Goethe surely had his own valid reasons for why he wrote 2174 lines and not 442. It is equally problematic to put the values of our society today above those of the 18th century and to delete inconvenient passages. To give one example: the play starts with a monologue by Iphigenia, which contains 53 lines in Goethe's original versus 15 lines in Klingmann. Klingmann has indeed preserved the basic information that Iphigenia still feels like a stranger in Tauris after all these years, that she is longing for her family, that she serves the goddess with reluctance. He has even retained the famous line '*Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend*', which he translates as 'Searching within myself to find the lost Greek land' (17). This translation alone could spark controversy as to whether the German '*mit der Seele*' (with the soul) is best expressed by 'within myself' or whether it was necessary to add the word 'lost', which does not feature in the original. Since Klingmann does not discuss the rationale of his English translation at all, one can only speculate.

Coming back to the monologue, in Goethe Iphigenia elaborates on family bonds in general and begs the goddess Diana to save her and take her back to her family, to her home country, as she had done with Agamemnon, comparing her life in Tauris to a second death. Iphigenia also makes some conservative remarks on the traditional role of men at home and on the battlefield, while criticizing in a surprisingly modern way the 'happy' destiny of women at the mercy of men. It is interesting that she characterizes Thoas, the king of Tauris, as a noble man, '*edler Mann*', which is important for the complex and ambivalent relationship between them. None of this features in Klingmann's version. And so, although he has

succeeded in simplifying and streamlining the plot, it comes at the price of compromising complexity and depth, and losing out on some beautiful language.

Another critic, Jochen Golz, wrote in his review for the Goethe-Gesellschaft: 'Für Schüler und Studenten, deren Beschäftigung mit Goethe erst beginnt, könnte das Studium von Klingmanns Fassung einen Anfang bedeuten' – a statement which I would support.¹ Klingmann's condensed text would easily allow a lecturer to cover a German drama from the classical period in one term. It might also be more encouraging for students to deal with a manageable number of lines while still getting a glimpse of the original. It might serve as a taster and might instil in some an interest in learning more about Goethe. To be pragmatic: better *some* Goethe than no Goethe at all.

On the back cover, Klingmann asks why no opera based on Goethe's drama exists. This is a valid question, since – to my knowledge – the only opera based on the myth of Iphigenia in Tauris is the Baroque opera *Iphigénie en Tauride* composed by the German composer Christoph Willibald Gluck in 1779 (the same year as Goethe's play), but using a libretto by Nicolas François Guillard, which in turn was based on a play of the same name by Claude Guimond de La Touche, who reworked Euripides' play. An opera based on Goethe is still a *desiderium*. Since there is no opera without a libretto, Klingmann has provided one as a starting point. With 442 lines, it would be a very short opera but some do only last one hour. My wish for Klingmann is that his *Little Book* will inspire a composer and that his hope of hearing a production on the stage will one day be fulfilled.

Elke Steinmeyer
University of KwaZulu-Natal

¹ Jochen Golz, 'Brauchen wir eine Kurzfassung von Goethes Schauspiel *Iphigenie auf Tauris*? Zu einem Büchlein des südafrikanischen Germanisten Ulrich Klingmann', <https://www.goethe-gesellschaft.de/neue-buecher/brauchen-wir-eine-kurzfassung-von-goethes-schauspiel-iphigenie-auf-tauris-zu-einem-buechlein-des-suedafrikanischen-germanisten-klaus-klingmann/>.